

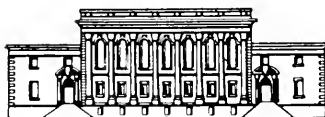
SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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Presented by
Heidi L. Stukey, '84

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THE KITCHEN

a play by Heidi Stuke

Archives

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THE KITCHEN

Cast of Characters

Janie Austin, a recent college graduate, our confused heroine

Gert, her unmarried aunt who has matriarchical tendencies

Marge, her mother

Michael, her boyfriend

John, her father, an Alaskan adventurer of sorts

Place

The porch and kitchen of the Austin farm in upstate New York

Time

Contemporary

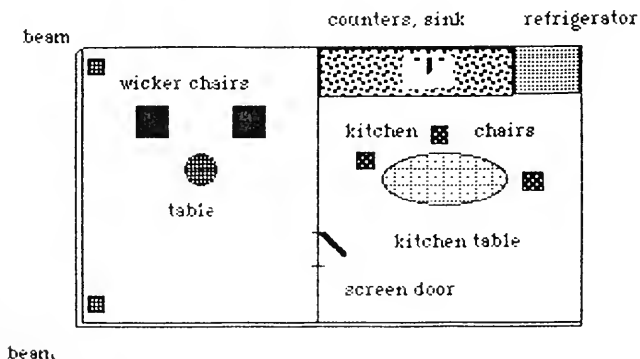
Setting

Scene I: an afternoon in early summer

Scene II: the evening of the same day

Scene III: an evening, two days later

Set for THE KITCHEN



Scene I

(Curtain. A girl in her early twenties walks on stage from stage right to the porch. She opens the screen door and steps into the kitchen. The screen door slams shut. She is red-faced. She sits facing audience, grabs a paper napkin from a holder on the table, and wipes her face. She scratches at some of the paint on her speckled white pants. She just sits for a moment, looking down. An older woman, maybe sixty-five or seventy, steps onto the porch. She wears a plain cotton dress and pro-keds. She pokes her head inside the door.)

Gert: Janie? Hello, honey. Who said you could take a rest. You've only been at it a week and already you're pooping out on the job.

Janie: Hey, Aunt Gert, come on in. (Janie stands up and leans against the counter. Gert walks in and faces her.) It's hard work, though. I've just been scraping the back of the garage. I don't think it's been painted since World War I or some other period of ancient history.

Gert: Well, this piece of antiquity needs to have a seat. Do you mind If I sit down?

Janie: Oh, Gert. (She sits.)

Gert: Well, I just thought I'd ask. No, your grandfather painted every building on this place--you don't remember him, do you?

Janie: No, I don't.

Gert: ...back in the depression. He got a real good deal on a whole closed out batch of paint from the GLF. I guess that was about '33 or so. Your dad was just a little bit of a squirt back then. Before I sold the place to your father, I had it freshly painted.

That was twenty years ago when you were just a little squirt, learning how to talk and be sassy. You were a little scorch, Janie.

Janie: (innocently) Me? (She sits down beside Gert at the table.)

So what's going on today?

Gert: Oh, the same old jazz. I went out with my can of kerosene this morning and got all of those copulating Japanese beetles off of my tomato plants. Those little buggers multiply like you wouldn't believe.

Janie: They're gonna start copulating under the leaves from now on, Gert.

Gert: Oh, I'll find them. Then I hung some clothes out on the line and had my lunch. You had your lunch, Janie?

Janie: No, but that's okay. I'm trying to lose some of this weight from school.

Gert: Don't starve yourself, girl. Well, anyway, after lunch--this is what I came over to tell you--I just happened to be taking my medicine by the kitchen window. I was getting a glass of water, you know.

That doctor prescribes such large pills for my nerves that it makes me nervous just having to take them. Anyway, I was swallowing that damned horse pill and looking out the window at my gardenias in the window box--you^{know,} this hot weather and dry spell have just about murdered them--and I glanced over to your place and saw a big pickup truck, I think it was dark brown or maybe black, drive through the side gate and back behind the barn. Now what do you suppose he's doing back there?

Janie: I don't know, Aunt Gert. I guess he's just fishing or target shooting out back. I don't think anyone's back there. As a matter of fact I know no one else is back there.

Gert: But suppose one of you kids was playing back there and some bunch

of jokers were shooting off their guns, someone could get hurt;
and it sure as hell wouldn't be one of them.

Janie: No one's gonna get their brains blown out, Gert, really.

Gert: I just wish your dad had taken a little bit of time before he
went gallivanting back up there to Alaska that last time and put
up some kind of blockade to keep people out. He just thinks he's
some young buck who can take off whenever he wants. He doesn't
think he'll ever get old. What am I supposed to tell people? My
only brother thinks he's twenty-five years old and comes home when ^{the}
vegetables are ripe in the summer, but not when my cellar's flooded in the
spring.

Janie: Well, I don't know. He can do something about it. He'll be home
tomorrow...for the whole summer.

Gert: I know. I know, but just the same I've got some extra clothes-
line in my utility room somewhere. I'll run home and get it, and
we'll string it up across the gate, okay?

Janie: Aunt Gert, I just remembered. Cliff Thomas call this morning
and talked to Mom about going back and fishing in the Nine Mile.
It's okay.

Gert: You wouldn't try to pull one over on an old lady, would you?

Janie: Me? No, really, he's got a brown truck too. A Ford I think.

Gert: Well, okay. I just thought I'd let you know since you're so busy
working around the place. What are you going to work on now?

Janie: Well, I'm getting ready to prime the bare spots on the garage.

I tell you though, it's a whole lot harder than I thought it would

be, a lot harder than studying. ever seemed.

Gert: I'll bet it feels good to be a college graduate, now doesn't it?

Janie: Sure does, Gert, feels a little scary though.

Gert: Honey, you don't have to worry about anything. You have the whole world open to you. You're going to take that job offer in Westmoreland for teaching aren't you?

Janie: Yeah, I guess I probably will. Do it for a year anyway to see if I like it. A lot kind of depends on Michael and what he does.

Gert: Don't go planning your life around him, Janie. He's got a lot of growing up to do. (Gert stands up and walks in front of the table, facing the audience. She's looking at where the garden used to be.)

Janie: He's grown up a lot this past year. You just haven't seem him much.

Gert: Well, maybe. I just think it'd be good for you to spend some time around home next year. You've been away four years. We've really missed you.

Janie: (She looks down and scratches at the paint on her pants again.) I **know** I've missed you too.

Gert: (Bending out toward the audience.) Doesn't look like your mom's done a whole lot with these flowerbeds here, this spring.

Janie: Aw Gert, gardening's just not her thing. It's not her fault. Other things are more important to her.

Gert: Yes, like playing bridge and going places. (Gert turns toward Janie who is still sitting, her feet now propped up on the table.) You

know, when you're away at school, she's on the go all the time.

I look over in your driveway and her car's never there. I don't know where she goes, it's 'just go-go-go. (Janie shrugs. Gert turns back.) Well, all I know is when I moved off this place twenty years ago, I left these flowerbeds in wonderful shape. It was August then and everything was just beautiful. Then I had to start all over again at my new place the next spring. I ordered glad bulbs from a bulb place near Buffalo and remember distinctly that I ordered assorted color bulbs. When they came up, every damn one of them was yellow. Remember that Janie? (Gert smiles and shakes her head at the memory.)

Janie: No, sure don't. I was pretty small then.

Gert: Oh yeah, I get all of you kids mixed up. It must have been Sarah. She would have been (Phone rings.) ten or so...

Janie: 'Cuse me, Gert. (She answers it.) Hello...hey!...okay, sure,... yeah...see you then, bye. (Janie looks at Gert who has sat down again and is obviously waiting to be filled in on the conversation.) Michael.

Gert: Of course, who else. What's he got to say for himself?

Janie: We're going golfing tonight after supper. It's cheaper during the week, and it stays light so late these days.

Gert: Well, that's because it's getting toward the middle of June. It'll be fall soon enough.

Janie: Oh Gert.

Gert: It will. Watch it, honey. Now that you're out of school, the

years will just roll on by.

Janie: This will be the first fall I won't be in school since I was five years old.

Gert: Not if you take that job in Westmoreland. You'd better take it. They won't hold it out forever.

Janie: I'm not quite sure I want it yet.

Gert: There's nothing wrong with that.

Janie: I know I want to stay here this summer and work on the place with Dad. He's been away so much the last ten years, it really needs the attention. Besides that, ~~we~~ just haven't seen each other much, especially the last few years. It was his idea, you know, last summer. He thinks none of us kids care about the place. Well, I do.

Gert: I know you do, honey. It certainly looks different from when your dad and I grew up on it. We had the horses then, of course, and your grandmother had the most beautiful flowers in every window box...remember...(She smiles and catches herself.) No, of course you wouldn't. Janie, I'm just getting old and silly. To me the past just seems to get bigger and bigger, but never any further away. Oh, I don't know. What did Mike have to say anyway?

Janie: Nothing much, just that he'd pick me up. Early even^{ing} is the best time to golf, my favorite anyway.

Gert: What's he planning to ^{do} now ~~not~~ that he's finished with school. I know you told me already.

Janie: He had an interview back in Rochester yesterday at the newspaper there. It'd be a good job for him to start with. He'll be lucky

since just about everybody in the world has a journalism degree.

Gert: Does he want you to go out there with him?

Janie: (with indifference) We haven't even thought about it. All I know is I've got to peel some more skin off that garage before Dad gets home tomorrow. Do I have any paint chips in my hair?
(She bends over for Gert to check.)

Gert: Yes. (She ruffles her hair then turns toward the screen door in response to something outside.) Sounds like you mother's coming in from one of her adventures.

Janie: Oh Gert. You're rough on her.

Gert: Well, I'll go now and get out of everyone's way. Looks like she had been to the grocery store.

Janie: You don't have to. (They look at each other.)

Gert: Yeah, your mother will think I'm snooping around her house, checking for dust.

Janie: Weren't you?

Gert: Oh, Janie, you scorch. (Gert slams the door as she waves Janie away.) Hello Margery. (She opens the door again for Marge, who enters from stage right holding two bags of groceries.)

Marge: Hello Gert, how are you today?

Gert: Oh, fine, fine. The arthritis in my thumb is kind of acting up today, but other than that...(The door slams and she calls in through the screen.) Janie, I've got some bug spray over at the house, why don't you come over and get it before you play golf tonight. You'll stir up a lot of bugs walking around that course.

Janie: (incredulously) Bug spray?

Gert: Yes, I think it's Right Off or Right Away or something. Oh and Marge...

Marge: Yes. (with patience as she puts things in cupboards)

Gert: I know John likes fresh peas, and so do you Janie. I'll pick a bunch from the garden and send them over this evening for you to have tomorrow when John comes home. Are you going to have a nice, big dinner for his first night home?

Marge: (winking at Janie) I thought I'd get him to take us out to dinner.

Gert: Oh Marge. That poor brother of mine hasn't had a home cooked meal in three months...well do as you wish. I'll have you all over one night as soon as he catches up on his sleep. (She starts away, from the door,) What's the matter? Don't you like green peas, Marge?

Marge: No, I don't. They taste like grass to me.

Gert: Well, I think they are absolutely delicious. I'll send some over with Janie tonight. Don't forget to come over.

Janie: I won't. Thank~~s~~, Aunt Gert.

Everyone: Bye. (Gert exits off the porch. Janie sticks her hand into a grocery bag, pulling out assorted grocery items.)

Marge: Well, tomorrow at this time Dad will be home. Janie, he's been away from what we consider civilization for three months, so just humor him the first few days. Let him watch what he wants on TV and don't pester him about starting the work around here right away.

Janie: I hardly ever watch TV anymore, Mom. It's not like when I was in high school. I'm not as selfish. I'd just resent him popping in every few months and disturbing our nice, little routine.

Marge: I know what you mean. Well, it is his home you know. You make it sound as though he's an outsider or something.

Janie: Sometimes he is.

Marge: You don't understand us now that we're older. We really get along well when he's home. We laugh, playscrabble, and have a good time.

Janie: I've always told people you have a good long distance marriage.
(She laughs.)

Marge: We're both slowing down. He won't be going to Alaska to fool around too much longer. (She turns around and looks at Janie from behind.) You've put on some weight this year, kid. What happened? (She pats her bottom.)

Janie: Senior year was traumatic. It'll come off in no time. Lay off, okay. I'm sensitive, Mom. (Janie gives a wounded look.)

Marge: All right. Now you know what it feels like to be teased about your weight. Pretty soon you'll have to wear a red scarf in your back pocket and hang a WIDE LOAD sign around your neck.

Janie: (ignoring it, almost) When I tease you, I'm just concerned about your health. You don't see too many fat, old people..

Marge: Sixty is just late middle age.

Janie: Right. (Janie pokes around in the other bag.) Mom, what do you buy these things for? (She pulls out a package of chocolate graham crackers, opens them, and sticks two in her mouth. She sits

down at the table, propping her feet up beside a leg of lamb.)

Marge: Anyway, just let Daddy relax for a few days. The flight always tires him out. Pass me a few grahams, please.

Janie: Forget it. You don't need them.

Marge: Shutup, neither do you. (She sits down at the other end of the table.) What did my favorite sister-in-law want anyway. She never comes over here unless she's up to something.

Janie: She came over to tell me that she'd seen a truck drive out behind the barn.

Marge: I swear that woman watches our house with a high powered telescope. Did you tell her it was just that Thomas boy?

Janie: Yes. (She pauses) You know, I did find a pair of binoculars behind the drapes of the living room window not long ago.

Marge: Oh, come on.

Janie: I did.

Marge: Well, I guess she doesn't have much else to do besides watch the old place. She still thinks she owns it. Did she say anything about me being a lousy housekeeper today? (Marge reaches for another graham.)

Janie: No, she was just lamenting the loss of the flowerbed out back. (Janie points toward the audience.) I defended you though.

Marge: Thanks, but those flowerbeds are still there, we just mow over them now, that's all. (They laugh.) She would have been different if she had married and had kids of her own.

Janie: Yeah, I guess so.

X
Marge: Kids require so much of you and before you know it they're out of college and paintⁱⁿed garages. Then they're gone.

Janie: Oh Mom...Michael and I are going golfing tonight.

Marge: Before you go, could you help me fill up those holes in the lawn that Rufus has dug up. I bought some soil today and some grass seed. Let's fill them in this afternoon.

Janie: You think the grass is going to grow in over night?

Marge: No, stupid, it will just look like I've made a valiant effort to save the lawn.

Janie: Oh.

Marge: Michael heard about the job in Rochester yet?

Janie: Not that I know of. It was just yesterday. I'll bet he'll get it though. He interned there one semester.

Marge: Oh, well that's good. Do you think he'll ask you to go with him?

Janie: Hell, Mom, I don't know. Things are so up in the air now.

Marge: Just stick to your guns. If you want to do something in Timbuktu, go do it, honey. You'll never be as free as you are right now. Don't let him decide your life for you. Don't let him just leave you waiting by the phone and make you pretend to yourself that you're protecting the home front just because you balance the checkbook. Janie, you are so young; I wish I were you.

Janie: Oh, Mom. It won't ever be like that with Michael and me...

Marge: Don't say that. Don't ever say that and don't ever say, "Oh, I won't get pregnant." Don't.

Janie: I don't know what I want. Gert wants me to take that job in Westmoreland. She wants me close. She wants me safe.

Marge: I know. I do too in some ways, selfish ways I guess. I've missed you so when you've been away at school, even though it's only three hours.

Janie: Well, I'm here now for the summer. I'm not going anywhere for at least another couple months.

Marge: Good. You know, Dad is really excited about working around the old place with you. He always remembers the day Roger told him he didn't care about the farm. He was crushed. He's so glad you care about it.

Janie: Well, I care about spending time with both of you too. I guess I always kind of thought that he thought that ^{what} Roger did was more important than what Sarah and I did.

Marge: Are you kidding. You girls could wrap him around your little finger three times as much as Roger. (She laughs, but without any smile.) When you and I were the only ones home and he'd call from Alaska, it would always be, "Oh, hello Marge. How are things going? Everything running smoothly?" When you'd get on the extension, his mood would instantly change. "Janie, Sweetheart, how are you honey? Is everything all right with you? Tell me about school... blah blah blah..."

Janie: But that was different. Now he's just interested in how my resume is shaping up. He missed graduation.

Marge: Now, he apologized for that. You know what happened. Something came up, and Roger needed his help in the office. They almost

lost some big contract for that library. You have to stop being selfish, Janie, your brother and sister need their father too.

Janie: Cool it, Mom.

Marge: You have to always have things your own way. We've spoiled you.

Janie: I'm not that half-baked.

Marge: Hand me another graham, would you? (Janie smiles.) Shutup, you snot.

Janie: Oh, shit Mom. Everything is so complicated.

Marge: Don't sweat it kid. We love you even if you are a brat.

Janie: I'm merely a product of my environment.

Marge: Thanks...Babe, you'll figure it all out. It'll come together for you.

Janie: Thank you for that concrete advice and encouragement. (Marge stands up.)

Marge: Let's go fill in those holes in the lawn.

Janie: Aw yuck. I've got to go do some scraping.

Marge: Come on. It will take you mind off of your future. (She pulls Janie to her feet.) I thought you loved this old place.

Janie: I do, but...

Marge: I hit a bird driving in the yard. It landed in the driveway, I think. Let's bury him in one of the holes.

Janie: Yuck. (Marge opens the door and they stand on the porch, looking off stage.) There have to be a half dozen major holes in that lawn. Maybe we should bury Rufus.

Marge: Hey, I just caught a glimpse of a reflection in ~~Cert's~~ window.

Janie: She must have her binoculars out.

Marge: Wave.

Curtain

Scene II

(Lights come up low in front, bright on the porch. Peepers are peeping quietly. Janie and Michael enter stage right. Janie has a golf bag and sets it against the house by the screen door.)

Janie: I hate golf. (She sits in the wicker rocker and begins to rock.)

Michael: No you don't.

Janie: I do.

Michael: All it is, is practice. (He sits on the step facing the audience upstage of her.) You're doing *great*.

Janie: Sure, I lost four balls.

Michael: (seriously) Okay, you are absolutely the worst beginner I have ever seen. There is no *hope* for you.

Janie: Now you're talking.

Michael: I was humiliated to be seen with you.

Janie: Great.

Michael: I never want to play golf with a loser like you again. Never.

Janie: Wonderful.

Michael: Besides, you look like an elephant in that little golf skirt.

Janie: (She stops rocking and leans forward.) Hey wait a second. You are kidding, right? I don't, do I? (He laughs.) Come on, tell

the truth. (still laughing) You shithead. (She sits back and starts rocking again.)

Michael: I ~~knew~~ that would get you. (He turns around and looks back at her.) Of course you don't,...a hippo maybe...Oh Janie, if you were fat I wouldn't ever tease you. (He slides back to her chair.) *You're* beautiful, incredibly sexy. (He picks up her leg and bites her calf as though it were a drumstick.) You drive me crazy. Don't worry. Pretty soon you'll be blowing Nancy Lopez off the course.

Janie: That's not funny. (She smiles as he puts down her leg and leans his back against her chair.) *Remember* when we first started talking about golf?

Michael: No.

Janie: Yes you do. It was the first time you answered my sign for a ride back home from school at Thanksgiving freshman year. Remember *how* surprised we were at finding someone at U of R from the next town over. We were just riding along running out of things to talk about, and I said something really dumb like "what kind of things did you do in high school?" And you said "swimming, golf and philosophy club."

Michael: I never said philosophy club. How do you remember all these little things?

Janie: You did too. I couldn't believe it. I thought you were okay until you said philosophy club.

Michael: Well, I thought you were intelligent and I guess I wanted to impress you. There's nothing wrong with that.

Janie: I bet Marshall doesn't even have a philosophy club.

Michael: They certainly do. I went once.

Janie: That's weird...What do you mean 'thought' I was intelligent?

Why past tense?

Michael: Well, anyone who would think that cast iron could float...

Janie: That wasn't my fault.

Michael: Sure. Here we are walking along the beach, and a couple is washing their habachi in the surf. I say "Look what the tide brought in." You look up and say "Oh yeah."

Janie: I was just thinking about something else. How do you remember things like that?

Michael: It's easy to remember all the dumb things you do, the number is staggering. (She kicks him in the ribs with her heel.) Hey, don't kick me. I'm not a horse.

Janie: If you were a horse, I ship you off to the glue factory.

Michael: If you were a horse, I'd buy you. (He turns and looks up at her.)

Janie: A horse! Thanks a lot.

Michael: Let me see your teeth.

Janie: I thought we were talking about golf.

Michael: Were we? Anyway, am I a good instructor?

Janie: Yeah, okay.

Michael: I'm good. You're a pretty good student. You just have to listen more and stop lifting your head up. (The only sound is that of the peepers for a few moments.) I'm pretty sure I got that job in Rochester, Janie.

Janie: Really?

Michael: No, I'm lying. I'm really going to sweep streets.

Janie: Oh, pal, that'll be rough on you. You're not used to hard work.

Michael: They said it was just a matter of confirming it.

Janie: (She leans down and kisses him on the head.) I'm really happy
for you, baby.

Michael: I wasn't going to say anything until I know for sure, but I
had to tell you. I think I can get into the old apartment with
Phil again. His new roommate's getting married this summer.

Janie: Oh, you're going to stay right in the city? Why not move out
to one of the towns, Pittsford or Brighton?

Michael: It'd be cheaper to stay in the old place, and I wouldn't have
to drive in. Why, what's the big deal?

Janie: Nothing.

Michael: What?

Janie: Nothing, really. I'm just tired of dealing with cities.

Michael: Rochester's not exactly a booming metropolis.

Janie: It's not this though.

Michael: You know I want you to come with me, don't you?

Janie: I'm really seriously thinking of taking the teaching thing at
St. Peter's in Westmoreland.

Michael: You could get something better than that. You have a really
good record...I mean, sure, it's great you painting the barn and
shingling roofs and mending fences and all that with your Dad, but
you can't stay here forever.

Janie: I'm not talking about forever, Michael. Just one year to decide

if I'd like to teach or if I want to go back to school or if I want to be a ^{con}struction worker or a nuclear physicist or whatever.

I just want an easy year, I think.

Michael: Aha! (He stands up and begins walking around the porch.) You think. You'don't really know what you want, my fickle friend. HA!

Janie: I do, but just not in what order,yet.

Michael: You want to go back to Rochester where our friends are, you want to be with me and make me dinners...

Janie: Hold it, don't blow it for yourself. You had something going. Our friends, my dear, are so concerned aboutmaking their fifty thousand at IBM to buy themselves BMWs, we don't even know them anymore.

Michael: Oh, come on! That's not fair. That's not everyone.

Janie: It makes me sick. Nobody cares about normal things anymore, like keeping flowerbeds and planting gardens and sittingout on nights like this. Everyone's too busy learning how to play squash and learning how to file their stock portfolio in their Apple II. I don't want you to become like that, Michael.

Michael: I'm going to be working for a newspaper, I won't be able to afford a pocket calculator for five years. Anyway, that's one of the reasons I need you to come out with me, I want you to come out with me. You can keep me in line,

Janie: I'm not your mother.

Michael: I'm beginning to see traces of her, around the chin area. (He presses his thumb to her chin making it double.)

Janie: Oh quit it. (brushing him away) I just don't want to watch you sucking it up.

Michael: I won't. I'm not impressed by those things. I like the same things you do. You know that, but face it, good country living is just as expensive as moderate urban living.

Janie: I don't have any idea what you are talking about.

Michael: Yeah, you do, a set of colonial straightbacks here, a hundred year old hand-made quilt there. Don't try to con me. You're going to be an expensive wench, power tools for making racks and stools and shelves.

Janie: (ignoring him) I'd still rather stay here for a year first. Who would want to have to deal with rent, utilities, phone bills, insurance, parking...

Michael: Shutup Janie.

Janie: food, movies, appliances...

Michael: Janie.

Janie: income tax, IRAs...

Michael: Would you be quiet! We have to grow up sometime, you know.

Janie: Then why haven't you asked me to marry you? (She rolls her eyes and throws her head back. Michael turns toward her in surprise.)

Michael: Because I didn't know what I was going to do until now. I've been thinking about it. Do you think I'd ask you to go back to Rochester with me if I weren't thinking about it? Give me a little more credit than that, babe.

Janie: Oops.

Michael: It's just that it's starting to finally occur to me that

I can't do everything. I have to choose one thing or take whatever's offered. When I was little, I thought I could be a doctor and an astronaut and a race car driver. Then...

Janie: You wanted to be a race car driver?

Michael: Yeah.

Janie: Oh.

Michael: Then when I went to school I could only choose one school.

Then when I was a sophomore I could only pick one major. Now I'm finally out, and I have to settle for one kind of job. I'll never be an investment banker or an engineer. Pretty soon I won't be able to choose a different woman every night. I'll just marry one, probably you. Everything's narrowing down, babe, and it's hard to believe there's been any sense to any of my decisions. I just want to be absolutely sure about us because this is the only other important choice I have left. I don't know. Does it make much sense? I've never said it out loud.

Janie: Sure, sure it does. I guess I was thinking that too, but not in words. It's kind of a stifling feeling, isn't it?

Michael: Yes, it really is. That's why I've always played golf. To get rid of that feeling.

Janie: I guess that's why I want to stay home for awhile, to figure it all out.

Michael: You can't just stay home because you're afraid though.

Janie: Who said I'm afraid. I just don't want to make any mistakes.

We wouldn't be a mistake, you know.

Michael: No, I don't think we would. I know we wouldn't. That's why you have to screw that job and come back to Rochester, please.

(He sits on the edge of the porch facing the audience. She stands up and sits beside him. They both put their chins in their hands and th~~e~~ir elbows on their knees.) It's a beautiful night, love.

Janie: Sure is.

Michael: Remember the summer when your parents were away, and we played strip badminton back here all the time? Win five points in a row and off comes your opponent's garment of your choice.

Janie: I got you a few times.

Michael: No, no. Except for that one time, the farthest you got me was down to my underwear and one sock. I got you though.

Janie: You cheat.

Michael: I'm just more skilled, that's all. I have to marry you, Janie. What other girl in the world would let herself be trounced at strip badminton as many times as you. What a sport.

Janie: I just have athlétic integrity. I play by the rules.

Micheal: That you do, my dear.

Janie: Today Mom and I were looking over at Gert's, you know, and we saw this reflection in the window. She was watching what we were doing with her binoculars.

Michael: No way.

Janie: Yes sir.

Michael: How much do you think she's worth, anyway?

Janie: A good..Michael! She not even sick. You're thinking about
BMW's and personal computers already.

Michael: Face it, you covet all of her antiques. I've seen you make
a mental list of all you want to cart out of there. She never
spends her money. There must be hundreds of thousands stuffed in
mattresses.

Janie: You're rotten. My poor, sweet Aunt Gert.

Michael: So are you.

Janie: Okay. You've got the house she's living in now. Seventy to
eighty I'd say. She worked for over thirty years, lived with her
parents and never spent much, with interest...maybesixty thou.
There are the other two houses...

Michael: She owns other house?

Janie: They were left to her. One's right in town and one's in your
town.

Michael: Where?

Janie: On Greenleaf. They're not great. They're worth maybe eighty
together. How much have we got?

Michael: 220 thousand dollars.

Janie: Oh, then there were my grandparents insurance policies and
Uncle George's too. Those were all around fifty with interest,
and including stray savings accounts, I'd guess another 200. Then
there's the sale of this house and all her furniture and stuff.
I bet she's worth a good half a million. She^{is} mad at Roger and Dad
right now, so that leaves Sarah and me.

Michael: Well, great.

Janie: You know, she's probably bugged this place and is listening to us right now.

Michael: I love you, Gert!

Janie: Shutup.

Michael: Why?

Janie: Because she probably has bugged it.

Michael: Don't be silly.

Janie: She'll probably leave everything to Daddy whether she mad at him or not, except the furniture. He's her only brother and she's really dependent on him.

Michael: But he's been gone so much of the time. Frankly, he scares me to death everytime he comes home.

Janie: Aw, he's a real marshmellow. Like look at this summer. He's spending two months at home away from his Roger and the business just to be with me and fix this old place up. I think that's great.

Michael: Sure. I'm glad for you. By the end of the summer, you'll be able to throw me around like a bale of hay. I like a forceful woman.

Janie: That's me. (She laughs) That's the opposite of me. I'm a marshmellow too. I'm such a sucker, I'll do anything anybody suggests sometimes.

Michael: (in a Bela Lugosa voice) Come to Rochester, my sweet. (He grabs her.) I will feed you grapes and chocolate milkshakes and make

you very happy. I will buy you wire chickens to put decorative eggs in. I will procure for you an antique butter churn. Forget job in Westmoreland. Forget about making Gert happy, even though she might will you something big. Come with me and I will buy you disc cameras and pocket calculators. (They start to laugh.)

Janie: You're pretty silly.

Michael: Well?

Janie: I'll give it considerable thought.

Michael: You could come out this summer and look for something. I'll start in a couple weeks, probably July 1. You can help me move out and just look around yourself.

Janie: But I don't know what I want to do yet.

Michael: That is getting to be a rather boring refrain, but that's okay. You don't have to stick with one thing. If you don't like one field, just try something else.

Janie: But you just said you only get one choice, one thing, that everything narrows down.

Michael: Yeah, but it's different for women.

Janie: Oh, come on! What a rotten thing to say. You think men's careers are more important? (sarcastically) And I thought you were different.

Michael: It's just that men are on the job market continually over their lives without these two or three year maternity leaves. It's just the way it is, Janie, face it.

Janie: Then what if I said I never wanted children, only a career and

a husband, huh?

Michael: I'd say you were full of shit.

Janie: Well, you're right, but that was still a sexist thing to say, and I'm not even a feminist.

Michael: Janie, that is precisely the reason you ought to come with me to Rochester. You, see, if you establish yourself for maybe five years, before...

Janie: (standing up) Establish myself in what? I just want the freedom to not know what I want for awhile. Is there anything wrong with that? I don't want to have to please you by going there or Gert and Mom by staying here. I want to be honest about all of this.

Michael: That's reasonable.

Janie: Oh, be quiet.

Michael: I love you. You do whatever you want. Don't let a poor, lonely, malnourished me influence you in any way. (He kisses her.)

Janie: You want some cold tea or a beer or something?

Michael: Said like a good kitchen wench. Show them a little attention and they are quite manageable.

Janie: Jerk. (She goes into the kitchen and switches on the light.

Michael follows her in and sits. Marge enters from stage left.)

Michael: Hi Mom.

Marge: Hi kids. How was your game? (She sits beside him.)

Janie: Okay.

Michael: It was good. Janie's picking it up.

Janie: No, I'm not.. I lost four balls.

Marge: Have you been sitting outside? It's a beautiful night to be out watching the stars. You know, that if you watch the sky all night you will see on the average of twenty-seven phenomena.

Michael: Really?

Janie: She just made that up.

Marge: I did not. I read it somewhere, in Suburban Science I think.

Janie: Mother is a wealth of useless information.

Michael: I love it.

Janie: You haven't had to live with it for twenty-two years. (She hands Michael a bottle of beer and sets a glass of tea on the table.)
You want anything, Mother? Iced tea?

Marge: No, I better not have any caffeine. Dad is coming home tomorrow.
I need my rest tonight.

Janie: Surely you aren't gearing up for bedroom gymnastics.

Marge: Oh, kid, what you don't know.

Janie: You're sixty, and Dad is, what, sixty-two.

Michael: Couldn't you hurt yourselves?

Marge: The second forty years are supposed to be the best years of your marriage, they say.

Michael: We'll remember that.

Marge: I came out to see how it went for you at the interview.

Michael: Well, I think I got it. They're going to call tomorrow to confirm it. Watch them not call, Oh God.

Marge: I'm sure they will honey. Janie, are you going to get up and mow the lawn before we have to go pick up Dad? He'll have a fit

if he sees how long we've let it go.

Janie: It is kind of high, isn't it? (She looks toward the window up stage.)

Marge: We have to leave here at nine to get to Syracuse on time.

Janie: Oh Mom.

Marge: Well, you let it go till the last minute, just like you always do. I don't know what it is with you Austins, you can't work unless you're under pressure. Your dad's the same way. Glad I'm not one of them.

Janie: Well, you have been for years. It wears off on you, you know.

Marge: Never. Well, goodnight. I'll give you a wakeup call at six, honey.

Janie: Thanks. Why don't you just do it if you're going to already be up.

Marge: Oh no, I've got lots of last minute things to do around here.

Janie: Aha!

Marge: Goodnight kids.

Michael: 'Night. (Marge exits left.) I love your mother dearly, but I know you'd go nuts trying to live here all next year. That's why...

Janie: Baby, enough, let's drop it for tonight, okay?

Michael: Okay. (He finishes off his beer and stands up. At the wall he feels a light switch.) This is the one that lights the backyard, isn't it?

Janie: Yeah.

Michael: If I recall you saying so, your mother is a pretty sound sleeper.

Janie: (smiling) Like a rock, or a medium size boulder.

Michael: Do you have a piece of string around here we could use for a
net?

Curtain

Scene III

(The lights come up with the kitchen dim and the porch brighter. Janie sits in one of the chairs with her legs draped over the side reading a book. A moment passes. John, her father, comes into the kitchen, turns on the light, and starts to open the refrigerator. Then he notices the light on the porch. He peeks out the screen door and sees Janie.)

John: Hey, Darlin.

Janie: Hi Dad, haven't seen much of you this evening. (He comes out and slowly sits down in the other chair.)

John: Oh, I've been over to Gert's listening to her report on everybody in town. She was telling me about how many people drive out and back to fish without permission.

Janie: Mom and I get it all the time.

John: Well, she likes to keep an eye on this place. It was her home for many, many years. I came out to get something to drink, but I think I'll just stay out here with you for awhile.

Janie: Good. (She looks over at him.) Has all you jet lag worn off?

John: Oh yes. I'm a tough, old creature. You've been doing some good things around the place. I'll help you finish up priming the garage tomorrow. The lawn looks really nice too.

Janie: Oh, yes, I take special pride in the lawn.

John: Marge shouldn't let that damn dog dig holes in the yard like that.

Janie: He thinks he owns the place, Dad. You can't tell him what to do.

John: He's just never been trained properly, that's all.

Janie: I guess she goes pretty easy on him. After all it's just the two of them a lot of the time.

John: What are you reading there, babe?

Janie: A novel about Vietnam, Going After Cacciato. This soldier decides he's going to walk to Paris and just quit the war. It's mainly about his buddy who thinks about going and catching up with him. I'm only about half way through. Vietnam kind of fell through the cracks for kids around my age. It was going on when we were young, but we really didn't understand it. Then when when we were older no one ever explained it to us.

John: Man, I'm glad Roger missed the draft by two or three years. That would have been a nightmare to have him over there. But, good for you. I'm glad they taught you something about continuing to study after they shipped you off, we sure payed enough. You know, Janie, I wanted to tell you how sorry I am about missing your graduation. It just couldn't be helped. Roger needed me to help with the business in Alaska, and I just couldn't pull out when he needed someone with, you know, a little more business experience and sense.

Janie: Oh, I know. I'm just glad that you're here for the summer. That's enough for me.

John: Well, I'm just very proud of you, that's all. I'm proud of Roger,

too, He's really become established up there. He's picking up contracts for buildings and roads like you wouldn't believe. He's putting in a bid now for a cemetery contract.

Janie: Since when do you need to build cemeteries.

John: Hey, Missy, it's a big job, big money in contracts like that.

You've got to go in and survey and level everything off with bulldozers. There's drainage and waterlines and landscaping. I've gotten him a lot of those contracts. I know how to bid and dicker with these towns. See the towns receive federal block grants on behalf of the minorities, mostly the Indian population. Roger just has to learn to keep his crews smaller. He'll make a lot more profit that way. He's so friendly, he likes to hire all of his buddies and then go drink with them after work. That's just not good business.

Janie: So what do you do up there exactly? I've never really figured it out.

John: I take care of the books, negotiate deals for him, fly to Seattle and Portland to look at new equipment for him.

Janie: Oh.

John: Well, honey it sure is good to be home, just to relax. We eat out a lot up there or else I cook. I've gotten pretty good, you know that?

Janie: Really?

John: Mom doesn't cook very often when I'm not here, does she?

Janie: I don't think so. I usually fend for myself when I come home.

John: She's always hated to cook. I don't know what it is.

Janie: It's just not her thing.

John: She'd rather be playing bridge or shopping or just on the go.

Janie: Sounds like you've been talking to Gert.

John: Yeah, they really have it out for each other sometimes. I don't know why.

Janie: What do you think I should do this fall?

John: You have that offer at St. Peter's don't you?

Janie: Yeah, but Michael wants me to go back to Rochester with him and find a job there.

John: What does he want you to live with him or something like that?
I'm not too keen on that.

Janie: No, I don't think so. He just wants me to be close. He got a job with the Rochester Press.

John: Well, good for him, if that's what he wants. He's going to be a reporter?

Janie: Yeah, probably features to start.

John: Well, are you going to go back there. You always liked it at school didn't you?

Janie: I'm asking you Dad, what do you think I should do. I want some good old advice. You've never been shy about giving it in the past.

John: Well, you were never twenty-two and a young woman out of college. You have to make your own choice. It's up to you. I have good faith in your judgment, honey. I don't know what you want.

Janie: I get the feeling Gert and Mom want me to stay here next year.

John: Rochester's only three hours west on the pike. You could still see Michael. That would be cheaper than living out there. But I wouldn't worry about anyone else. Do what you want. (They rock in silence for a moment.)

Janie: But Dad, I don't know what I want. I want to be with him...

John: Remember, darlin, young men are apt to change their minds at any time. Don't get your heart set on anything at this stage.

Janie: But I want to just take it easy for awhile and not have the pressure to perform at a real job. St. Peter's would be low pressure.

John: Well, I'm not about to try to make up your mind for you.

Janie: You're still involved with Roger's life, and he's five years older than me.

John: That's different.

Janie: How?

John: Honey, I don't know, it just is. He...it's just different.

Janie: I don't really see how.

John: He's trying to build something for himself.

Janie: And I'm not? (He stands up.)

John: How about some of that iced tea I came out to get.

Janie: Dad?

John: (turning back toward her) I came home didn't I? I'm here. Tomorrow I'm going to show you some tricks about painting. Then we're going to reshingle the garden house. Would I be doing all of this if I didn't care about my sweet girl?

Janie: No, I guess not.

John: Of course not. Come on inside. (She follows him into the kitchen. She sits at the table, and he opens the refrigerator.) Is the tea in this yellow thing?

Janie: Usually.

John: Wonder what else there is to eat around here. What's this? (He pulls something out wrapped in tin foil and opens it.) Oh God.

Janie: What? What is it?

John: I don't know. I can't identify it.

Janie: Describe it.

John: It's greenish and hard.

Janie: Oh, well, smell it.

John: Oh God, I can't. I have a weak stomach. (He passes it to her.)

Janie: Oh, that mine. We got a pasta maker and I made spinach pasta. It's okay. It was only a week ago.

John: What are in these tupperware things?

Janie: Choose the correct container and you may win a hundred thousand dollars.

John: Oh Margery. (He opens a container and smells it.) When did you have this swiss steak?

Janie: You don't want to know, Dad.

John: I wonder what's in this one.

Janie: Dad, I wouldn't venture back there too far. There may be things growing inside.

John: Why doesn't she clean this refrigerator?

Janie: It's more interesting this way. I know what's in that orange thing. (He hands her a covered orange dish.) Sweet potatoes, yum.

(She gets up to get a fork.) They're just from a few nights ago.

John: Cold?

Janie: Sure, they're great this way.

John: That's disgusting.

Janie: I've been eating college food for four years. I can eat virtually anything.

John: Look at these ketchup and mustard tops. Doesn't she ever clean them off?

Janie: (She looks up as he holds them in front of her.) Those are pretty gross.

John: Gert would have a field day here. That's one thing I always have to say about Gert. She is a good cook as well as a good housekeeper, just like my mother. Now she was an industrious woman. That was a rather big surprise when I married your mother. She just doesn't care, Janie.

Janie: Aw, go easy on her, Dad. I just heard the other day that the second forty years are supposed to be the best.

John: Oh really? (He laughs.) Now, don't get me wrong. I love your mother. She's a wonderful woman and all, but she just never tried very hard around here. That's the one thing you and Michael will have going for you. You know each other's weaknesses. Mom and I only knew each other a month before we got married.

Janie: Ah, the urgent passions fostered by the big WWII.

John: I really miss her an awful lot when I'm in Alaska. Oh, God, what do you think this was? (He shows a dish to Janie.)

Janie: It was one of her experimental desserts. (She smells it.)

The one with bananas and peanut butter, I think. Let's just ^wthrough that one out, okay.

John: The dish too? Fine with me. This is depressing. I'm ^{just} going to put it all back until she cleans it out herself. I just don't have the stomach for it. (He puts everything away.)

Do you think the tea is okay?

Janie: I make the tea. It's fine.

John: Oh good. (He pours some for himself and Janie.) Here you are, Darlin. (He sits down.)

Janie: I've been pricing paint around town for the barn. Since it's got to be oil base, it's a little harder to find. Everything's latex these days, and of course it's more expensive.

John: I guess paint has gotten more expensive. What is it now, sixteen-eighteen bucks a gallon?

Janie: Yeah, but I found about fifteen gallons on sale for 11.99... Well...What do you think?

John: That's great honey.

Janie: Should I buy it?

John: Janie.

Janie: Only thing is, it's red. I thought red with white trim would be a nice change. Do you think so?

John: Roger called today, Janie.

Janie: (cautiously) What's up? Is he okay?

John: Remember that accident one of his men had with the truck last winter?

Janie: That's all out of court and everything, isn't it?

John: Well, there are some problems which just came up with the civil suit. The man who was killed apparently had a wife he was separated from. She and a couple kids just surfaced this spring. We thought it was all going to be kept out of court. But...poor Roger called today. He's really shaken about what to do. I'm going to stay couple more days, honey, but then I have to go back up. I have to.

Janie: Oh great.

John: Well, you can still do some work around here. Maybe that boyfriend of yours can help you. He's pretty handy.

Janie: You're just going to rush right back up there to pull him out of this? He's a big boy, you know Dad. Shouldn't he be able to handle his own affairs without calling for you?

John: He's my son.

Janie: I'm your daughter. I've planned to spend my summer here at home with you for a year, Dad. It's the middle of June. What am I supposed to do? (She stands up and starts to pace around the table.)

John: Honey, I don't worry about you. I've never worried. You're the white sheep of this crazy bunch. Maybe I can come home and we can fix up the place next summer. You can spend this summer just doing what you can.

Janie: Oh, shit. I don't believe this.

John: Listen, Janie, Roger needs me. If it were you or Sarah, I'd do the same thing. I'd do anything for my children. Don't take this personally.

Janie: (She stops and looks at him.) I always honestly thought that you and Mom loved me the most. I've never disappointed you, have I?

John: No, of course not.

Janie: Roger doesn't even care about this place. He told you that once, and I'm willing to spend the whole summer here smelling like paint thinner.

John: I love you for wanting to do this, really I do. I just want to see Roger through this mess. This could throw off his whole future. Don't you see? There are cutthroat lawyers in that part of Alaska. I need to look after things in Juneau while he keeps the business going on down in Ketchikan. I have to go. I'm going, but I'll do my best to help you in the next few days. Please understand, Janie.

Janie: I'll always be your daughter, but I'll never be able to twist you, never again.

John: When you were little you could make me do just about anything. There was something in you when you were maybe seven, eight, nine, ten that just made me adore you. Remember how I taught you the aircraft call letters when you were little? Do you still remember them? You used to rattle them off around the airport. Do you still remember the call for that old Cherokee 180 of mine.

Janie: 6815Juliet. (She sits back down.)

John: That plane was a beauty. It handled so well, just like a dream.

Do you still remember the alphabet?

Janie: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo...I could run right through it. You don't forget things you learn when you're very little. Aw Dad...

John: I used to have this recurring nightmare that you were flying with me, and you somehow got out of the plane and walked to the edge of the wing. Sometimes you would walk off and sometimes you wouldn't. I could never do anything. That's what I thought of when I was in the chopper going down outside of Nome a couple years ago. I thought about that dream.

Janie: Well, I'm not going to commit suicide or anything Dad, don't worry.

John: Oh God, don't even say things like that.

Janie: Maybe I can get my old job back at Carson's. There's always old people who need sponge baths.

John: Mother's going to join me in the fall, Janie, we've decided. She's been wanting to come to Alaska for a long time.

Janie: I know. Are you going to sell?

John: This place? I could never sell it. I've lived here two-thirds of my life. If you want to, you can live here next year, or I'm sure Gert would love to have you live with her and then close this house up.

Janie: Be serious, Dad. She'd drive me nuts.

John: You could always go back to Rochester, like you said. When's Michael's work start?

Janie: Next week, but listen I don't just want to follow him because I don't have any other choice, I don't think. I could work at St. Peter's school. I could even turn into a nun.

John: That would be something to see. Well, I'm happy for Michael. He's a good boy.

Janie: Who are you the Godfather or something?

John: You always wondered what my real line of work was, didn't you kid? But Michael now, he's landed himself a good job and will start to establish himself. If I were a young man, I'd buy a personal computer to manage my life. It took me thirty-five years to get Mother to balance the checkbook.

Janie: I don't like computers.

John: You just don't understand them.

Janie: I'm a good liberal arts person. I took BASIC last year.

John: Do you still have your books? Roger's going to invest in one.

Janie: Wonderful.

John: You do understand about me leaving, don't you sweetheart?

Janie: Of course. I'm a real sport. (He looks at his watch.)

John: Well, this old boy's getting tired. It's eleven o'clock.

I'll wake you at seven to work on the right side of the garage.

The early morning is best before the gnats come out. We'll really hit it for the next couple of days, right kid?

Janie: Right, Dad. G'night. (He walks over and kisses her.)

John: Goodnight, Darlin, sleep well. (He exits stage left. Janie gets up and walks onto the porch. She looks offstage.)

Janie: Oh, Gert, are you still up too. (She laughs, climbs into her chair, picks up the book and begins to rock.)

Curtain

